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Effective Counter-Effort

Festivals, CIA & All That Jazz

By WALT FRIEDENBERG

Scripps-Howard Staff Writer

Whatever the propriety of the Central Intelligence Agency's financial aid to student organizations, these two points stand out:

- In view of the Soviet Union's gigantic post-war effort to influence the world's students and youth in favor of communism, some American counter-effort has been sorely needed.



- In the two cases I know about—the communist-sponsored World Youth Festival in Vienna in 1959 and the one in Helsinki in 1962—the opposition that was partly financed and inspired by the CIA was very effective.

The background is this: After World War II, in an effort to build up communism's youthful ranks in newly independent countries, and to flood neutral-minded future leaders in those lands with anti-American propaganda, Moscow sponsored a series of World Youth Festivals ostensibly under the banner of global "peace and friendship."

MORE RALLIES

With the full resources of the Komsomol, or Communist Youth League, behind them, and millions of dollars for transportation, housing and food and stadium spectacles, these rallies grew in effectiveness: Prague 1947, Budapest 1949, East Berlin 1951, Bucharest 1953, Warsaw 1955, Moscow 1957.

Brimming with confidence, the communist organizers decided in 1959 to come out from behind the Iron Curtain. There would be greater risks in controlling the stacked-deck "open discussions," the Austrian press would not be a faithful claque, but the gains of appearing in a neutral country made it appear worth while.

But it was the first time also that non-communists and anti-communists could operate with even a slight chance to toss a monkey

wrench into the works of the well-oiled festival steamroller.

Trouble was that in contrast to the Komsomol's experienced agents and buckets of money, the anti-festival youths were in weak shape. There was the International Union of Socialist youth organizations and a few Catholic youth groups, but they had little oomph. Something more was needed.

CIA CHANNELS

Accordingly, the independent Service for Information on the Vienna Youth Festival was organized at Cambridge, Mass., with financial support from individuals, foundations, companies — and CIA channels.

Its main job was to alert unsuspecting young Americans to the true nature of the festival, and prepare and distribute factual information about America — aid programs, foreign policy, education, race relations — that the communists at Vienna were bound to blast the U.S. on.

At Vienna, young Americans involved with the Cambridge group spoke up at open meetings to counteract communist attacks on the U.S. They handed out pamphlets at delegates' dormitories — and sneaked their own pamphlets alongside the communist propaganda on display tables.

A news service publicized the iron-fisted control the festival organizers wielded over festival activities, and the beatings festival thugs gave to newsmen and "hostile" delegates.

Other episodes — not attributable to the Cambridge group — included anti-festival demonstrations, and the flight over a stadium of a light plane trailing the banner "Remember Hungary." By calculated coincidence American Jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald was appearing in Vienna and drew thousands away from festival-staged events.

The IRS was instrumental in having young Americans visit dormitories where they could talk with Africans, Latin Americans and others freely and effectively.